Reading Aloud: an activity for all ages!

We fasten our seat belts and face a long, dark, 3 hour trip home from New Hampshire. I switch on the reading light above my seat, open my copy of Louise Penny's *Inspector Gamache* mystery and start reading where we left off on the drive up. There is a chance that we might discover who the murderer is before we reach home. If not, we may need to sit in the driveway for a few more minutes to finish that last chapter.

Reading to someone, and being read to, are such enjoyable experiences! You are meeting the same characters, wondering what will happen next (and sharing guesses), and laughing or sighing over the turns in the plot. Taking turns being the reader gives you both the luxury of being read to!

For me, the joy of being read to began as a young child. I clearly remember laughing hilariously with my mother about the mischievous antics of Curious George! Reading aloud to children is one of the most important gifts an adult can give to a child. Hearing stories helps children learn vocabulary, introduces them to the structure of narrative, opens new experiences and allows them to use their imagination. Even after the child is able to read independently, it is important to continue to read aloud. Listening to books that are harder than the ones he or she is able to read introduces new vocabulary words and sparks conversations that are vital to the development of good reading skills. One of the most important aspects of reading to a child is the relationship that is nurtured by this reading time. The child receives the gift of attention and closeness. And, both the adult and child gain a shared experience. Years later, the adventures of Curious George, Winnie the Pooh, Bunnicula, John Henry or Mr. Popper will be part of the common heritage the adult and child have created.

The Cambridge Public Library, in partnership with the Agenda for Children Literacy Initiative, has two outreach projects designed to involve Cambridge adults in reading to young children. These initiatives are the Welcome Baby Project and the Story Hour Kit Delivery Project. The Welcome Baby Project sends all Cambridge residents who are parents of a new child several books, information about sharing books with the youngest children, a canvas carrying bag, a library card application (for adults) and information about a literacy home visit from the Agenda for Children staff. The Story Hour Kit Delivery Project delivers a kit of about ten books on a variety of themes to Cambridge family childcare educators/providers every other week. These kits are a rich source of outstanding books to read to children.

Reading aloud is an activity for all ages. Try it with a friend, your family or a young child. Enormous enjoyment awaits you!